

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PERUVIAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND INTENTIONS TOWARD CHILE

REF: SANTIAGO 4600 REPEATED LIMA AS 4627

SUMMARY: CONTRARY TO CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY CHILEANS, WE THINK CURRENT AND PREDICTABLE PERUVIAN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATIONS ARGUE STRONGLY AGAINST AN ADVENTURE TO ATTACK CHILE. CERTAINLY THE STATED CHILEAN ESTIMATES OF PERU'S MILITARY CAPABILITIES ARE EXAGGERATED. END SUMMARY.

1. WE ARE SORRY TO NOTE FROM REFTTEL ANOTHER UPSWING OF CHILEAN CONCERN ABOUT PERUVIAN MILITARY INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES. WE HAD THOUGHT THE PROGRAM OF PERU-CHILE MILITARY POLITICAL VISITS AND ANDEAN COUNTRY ARMS CONTROL TALKS PURSUANT TO AYACUCHO DECLARATION HAD GONE FAR TO CALM CHILEAN NERVES AND REDUCE BILATERAL TENSIONS. WHATEVER LED TO CHILEAN APPROACH TO AMBASSADOR POPPER, PERUVIAN FACTS AS WE KNOW AND INTERPRET THEM DO NOT WARRANT THIS LEVEL OF CONCERN.

2. PERUVIAN INTERNAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS; PRESIDENT VELASCO NO LONGER HAS THE TIGHT HOLD ON THE GOVERNMENT'S REINS HE
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DEMONSTRATED FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS. THE PERUVIAN CABINET (ALL

MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES) AND SENIOR MILITARY COMMANDERS KNOW IT. THIS IS THEREFORE A TIME OF CHANGE WITHIN THE DOMESTIC POWER STRUCTURE, WHICH WE WOULD JUDGE IS NOT CONDUCTIVE TO MILITARY ADVENTURES. PRIME MINISTER MORALES BERMUDEZ, INTO WHOSE HANDS MORE AND MORE POWER IS DEVELOPING AND WHO IS PRESUMABLY VELASCO'S SUCCESSOR AS PRESIDENT, IS ABOVE ALL A PRUDENT MAN. HE KNOWS THAT A PERUVIAN IRREDIENTIST ATTACK, WHATEVER ITS OUTCOME IN MILITARY TERMS, MIGHT JEOPARDIZE THE VERY CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE PERUVIAN REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIMENT WHICH MORALES BERMUDEZ SUPPORTS. HE HAS ASSURED THE AMBASSADOR THAT PERU HAS NO INTENTION OF ATTACKING CHILE. WE HAVE RECEIVED THE SAME ASSURANCES FROM FOMMIN DE LA FLOR AND OTHER TOP-LEVEL PERUVIAN DECISION-MAKERS WHO ADD THAT THEIR MILITARY ACQUISITIONS ARE FOR MODERNIZATION AND EXCLUSIVELY FOR DEFENSE PURPOSES. IN THE HIGHLY UNLIKELY EVENT THAT A FADING BUT STILL TOUGH AND IRASCIBLE VELASCO SHOULD PROPOSE OR ORDER AN ATTACK ON CHILE, WE BELIEVE THE PERUVIAN ARMED FORCES WOULD NOT HEED SUCH AN ORDER.

3. DURING THE PAST WEEK, THE EMBASSY AIR ATTACHE HAS HAD SEVERAL CONVERSATIONS WITH SENIOR PERUVIAN AIR FORCE OFFICERS WHICH INDICATES RISING CONCERN ON THE PART OF THE GOP OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF CHILE'S ATTACKING PERU (SIC). CONCERN APPEARS TO BE BASED ON GOP'S BELIEF, DESPITE EMBASSY'S REPEATED DENIALS TO PERUVIAN SENIOR OFFICERS, THAT U.S. IS SUPPLYING CHILE WITH VAST QUANTITIES OF ARMS AND DUE TO PERUVIAN FEAR THAT CHILE COVETS COPPER-RICH SOUTHERN PERU.

4. INTERNAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS: THE PERUVIAN MILITARY GOVERNMENT IS SIX YEARS INTO A SOCIAL REVOLUTION. MANY INVESTMENT, BUDGETARY AND DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS HAVE BROUGHT PROBLEMS WHICH ARE PRESSING IN ON THE GOVERNMENT. THE GOP CANNOT AFFORD TO DIVERT ECONOMIC RESOURCES FROM DEVELOPMENT TO FIGHT A WAR. GOP LEADERS HAVE REPEATEDLY POINTED THIS OUT, AND WE SUSPECT THEY IN FACT BELIEVE IT.

5. AS TO PERUVIAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AS DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY SANTIAGO ARE AWARE FIGURES OFFERED BY GENERAL BRADY WERE EXAGGERATED. HIS FIGURE FOR NUMBER OF SOVIET T-55 TANKS WAS ABOUT DOUBLE LIMA DAO'S BEST INFORMATION, FOR EXAMPLE, AND PERU (AT LEAST AT THIS POINT) IS NOT "GETTING 280 ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS"

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FROM THE U.S. THERE ARE RUMORS THAT PERU HAS SAM 3 AND 6 MISSILE SYSTEMS. IF TRUE, THIS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT IN THE MILITARY BALANCE. HOWEVER, LIMA DAO DOUBTS THAT SUCH SYSTEMS ARE NOW IN COUNTRY EVEN THOUGH THEY POSSIBLY MAY HAVE BEEN ACQUIRED FOR FUTURE DELIVERY. (THE ABOVE ORDER OF BATTLE INFORMATION ON PERU IS NOFORN AND CANNOT, OF COURSE, BE RELAYED TO CHILEANS TO ABATE THEIR CONCERNS.) IT CAN OF COURSE BE STATED TO GOP THAT THERE ARE NOTABLE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN

OUR INFORMATION AND THAT OF THE CHILEANS.

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